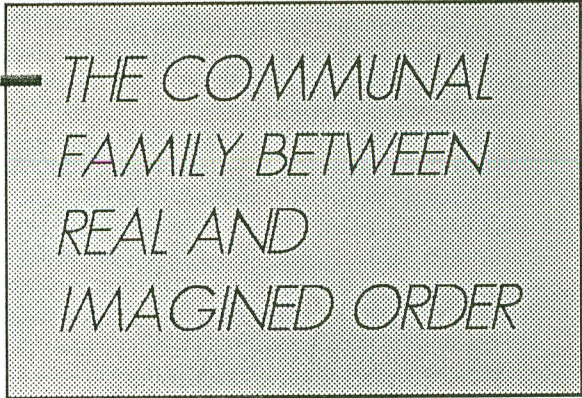


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THE COMMUNAL
 FAMILY BETWEEN
 REAL AND
 IMAGINED ORDER

In the existing literature on the *zadruga* (communal family), this family institution is usually treated as a community of blood, a community of life, a community of work and an community of authority. The authoress supports that considers such a *zadruga* model on two levels: on the level of imagined order and on the level of real order. She constructs a model for the *zadruga* containing both levels. She considers that ethnological interpretations of the communal family stemming from a knowledge of the interaction between ideal and real culture in a concrete historical context facilitate an insight into the structure of traditional thinking.

Research into the southern Slavic patriarchal institutions, among them the *zadruga* (communal family), was usually based in the past on unstated, and even unconscious theoretical postulates. This was not merely the case because individual writers (whether they were sociologists, ethnologists or legal theorists) were more or less superficial or untrained in terms of scholarship, but for a much more important reason. In the last century and at the turn of this century the patriarchal community was a part of everyday life. Everyone knew full well what the *zadruga* did and how it functioned; individuals could often describe this in a few words from their own experience on the subject. Many writers came from extended families, and many of them wrote on *zadrugas* during the period when these were widespread because they were interested in the practical aspects of *zadruga* economic existence.

A further reason for the lack of a theory on *zadrugas*, of course, lies in the very nature of the sciences that studied the *zadruga*. Researchers in the past, and indeed until quite

recently, were primarily interested in the origin and national significance of the zadruga. As far as *cultural and historical* ethnology and the history of *natural* law is concerned, fields that have also studied zadrugas (the most prominent representative in Yugoslavia being Valtazar Bogišić), the most essential were the value of the zadruga as a venerable institution. The objective of each new study was to support these values with new material.

The descriptions of communal families and their life, although based on reality, were essentially outlining an almost identical ideal type of communal family functioning, with an almost uniform value orientation. It seems, as if there existed a common, unconscious and theoretically unformulated model for the communal family. The same characteristics of that model can be found with writers of quite different schools of scholarship or ideological and political leanings. This model still survives today in scholarship and public opinion.

What, in fact, is the zadruga?

In the first edition of the Yugoslav Encyclopedia, Milenko Filipović, acclaimed Yugoslav ethnologist and expert on zadrugas said (in an article published in the Encyclopedia in 1971 which came out in English in 1976):

“Zadruga (household commune) is a term for a particular institution of communal life, wider than a biological family. The institution was very common until recently in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. The zadruga union consists of a number of families (at least two) whose members live and work communally according to the principle of division of labor, communally distribute the means of production which belong to the union, and communally consume the fruits of their own labor. The families which make up the zadruga are related; they have common ancestors, but kinship is not an obligatory condition for a zadruga. The small family, the biological or nuclear family, sometimes called a solitary family (inokošina) is in contrast to the zadruga.”

According to Emile Sicard, another contemporary researcher and expert on southern Slavic zadrugas, the zadruga or communal family is a *community of blood* which has an inseparable joint ownership of land. Only the women's property ownership is individual (those who came into the zadruga by marriage), often distinct from the collective property. The zadruga, furthermore, is a *community of life*: the members of the zadruga eat and rest together; they share the same traditions. The zadruga is also a *community of work*: all members work on the basis of a joint agreement as to distribution of work. And finally, the zadruga is an *community of authority*: the elder has the right to control and management with the property that is part of the community.

Sicard's understanding of the zadruga differs from Filipović's because he speaks exclusively of a kinship zadruga, and this is, in fact, the more common case of zadruga relations. In spite of this difference, these two authors permit four basic zadruga structures, i.e. hypothetically can be established that zadruga is:

1. a community of property, mostly bound by blood,
2. a community of life,
3. a community of work,
4. an community of authority.

I have tried to check this hypothesis and formulate a model for the zadruga within the postulates of contemporary ethnological theory¹. In my book *Struktura tradicijskog*

¹ I am familiar with dilemmas related to formulation of models in the humanities and particularly in ethnology. And I was unsure whether to form my analysis of the *structure of traditional thinking* as a model. But, due to

mišljenja (The Structure of Traditional Thought) I analyzed, therefore, the literature that discussed the *zadruga* family and relations within it in Croatia going back roughly two hundred years. I used material that relates to the *zadruga* in the work of Ivan Lovrić, a young man from Sinj (1756?-1777) who entered into polemical debate with Fortis, author of the famed work *Viaggio in Dalmazia*. I analyzed all texts that relate to the *zadruga* in the work *Satir iliti divji čovik* (The Satyr or Wild Man) by Antun Matija Reljković, a proponent of the Enlightenment (1732-1798). Furthermore I used responses from members of the **Društvo gospodarsko-hrvatsko slavonsko** (Society of Economics of Croatia-Slavonia) published in 1850 to the question of the future of *patriarchal life*, as they then called the communal family. I investigated the first systematic presentation of the southern Slavic *zadruga* from the pen of Ognjeslav Utješenović Ostrožinski (1859) a participant in the *Croatian National Revival*. I analyzed responses to questions about the *zadruga* in a survey on the natural law of the southern Slavs published by Valtazar Bogišić in 1874. And, finally, I investigated seven monographs on folk life and customs written by amateurs (peasants, teachers and village priests) on the basis of a single research instrument, Radić's *Osnova za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu* (Principles for Collecting and Studying Material on Folk Life) dating to the turn of the century².

The peasant communal family in the 18th and 19th centuries, until the beginning of the twentieth century prevailed in regions of Croatia primarily because it still served the functions of a feudal economic system, and especially the Military Frontier Zone. The abolition of serfdom in 1848 accelerated the process of *zadruga* disintegration. But as long as peasant way of production was on the level of mere subsistence, economically primitive, and life was poverty-stricken (frequently comparable to the culture of poverty as later described by Oscar Lewis), that institution in many respects helped the peasant family (in the sense postulated by E. Wolf) to survive.

Utješenović's work *Die Hauskommunionen der Suedslaven*, as stated above, is the first thorough description of the *zadruga* and its communal family life. Utješenović, a Serb from Croatia, a jurist and high official of the Austro-Hungarian administration, springs from a *zadruga* family himself, and as such comes forth as an unquestionable authority. In the spirit of the 19th century he leaned towards treatment of this family institution as something

the lack of ethnological theory here, and because of the need to constitute it, it struck me as useful to accept H. Gerndt's idea of constructing a model. Gerndt distinguishes between models concerned with reality and those concerned with the process of thought (*Real- und Denk-modelle*). In his opinion real models simplify the relations in reality, transpose them, show them with analogies or in other measures, for instance as architectural models or maps. The models concerned with the process of thought contain, to the contrary, abstract sketches, concept systems. We do not understand them through observation but rather we must think on them. These models may be descriptive and explanatory. Descriptive models express evident relations in an abstract way. Gerndt considers that they are a necessary assumption for scholarship because they objectivize with the help of linguistic regulation and sketch the framework for observation (Gerndt 1981: 197). Descriptive models relate to a certain phenomenon, emphasize the real interrelation or the interrelation of the categories of phenomena. Explanatory models do not deal with evident relations, rather with those that are hidden or possible. The interrelations that we encompass with explanatory models do not describe reality, rather they attempt at penetrating it deeply.

² *Osnova* is systematic, and for its day it is a well-designed research instrument that was not planned as a closed-type questionnaire, rather it was to serve as a reminder when researching real *folk life*, i.e. according to the prevalent concepts of that period it was to study the material, spiritual and social culture of the peasant. The material that was collected on the basis of the *Osnova* is still an inexhaustible treasurehold for Croatian ethnology.

uniquely southern Slavic ("a people with a dove's heart"). And as a follower of the conservative political economy of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl³ he supported the idea of the aristocracy and peasantry as forces⁴ on which the stability of the society relied. The economy, in his opinion, could only develop on a constant relationship of the peasantry and the aristocracy. In such an economic and political concept in Croatia and the southern Slavic lands, the *zadruga* was on the one hand the economic subject of primitive agriculture, while on the other a political symbol - a vehicle for the idea of Slavicism.

Utješenović's detailed description, which might also be understood as a *descriptive model* of *zadruga* relations (see footnote 1) could be shown, according to the proposed coordinates (i.e.: the *zadruga* as a communal family property, a community of work, a community of life and a community of authority) *ex post* as follows:

Utješenović's model:

- family ownership of land, livestock and means of labor; the *zadruga* has been kept together under the auspices of the family idea of the people with a dove's heart, the *zadruga* lives in a floral and the dominant value is harmony,
- joint life (song and dance after work, folklore as an ethnic sign,
- joint work,
- authority concentrated in the person of the head who runs the *zadruga*.

Utješenović's work *Die Hauskommunionen der Suedlsaven* met with considerable response in the world. Marx, it seems, knew of it⁵.

In Croatia, Utješenović's model of the *zadruga* prevailed in the work of Ante Radić, founder of modern Croatian ethnology. Radić sought to study *folk culture* which he defined as follows (Radić, 1897, 1):

"What is the people? Here one does not have an entire people in mind, nor does this refer to the Croats, or Serbs, or Slovenes, or Bulgars, but rather it refers to that greater part of the people, who in most cases - at present in any case - live in villages, work by hand, who in the great majority do not wear French clothing, who have not studied at any or almost any schools. And these are, it is true, differences that distinguish the people from the gentry, the intelligentsia, but all these are not true differences taken singly or all together, according to which we could distinguish a person of the people from a gentleman. The true distinction is a different culture. Gentlemen have their culture, the people have theirs."

With his brother, Stjepan the politician, Ante Radić fought at the turn of the century to establish the Croatian peasant as a political subject. His concept of *people* and *folk culture* were in harmony with these tendencies because when he says *people* he is thinking of the *peasants*. Although this is slightly reminiscent of Gramsci's hypothesis of folklore as a world view of the subordinated classes, the specific nature of Radić's concept and of his followers

³ This is W.H. Riehl, that same political economist from the last century, who was the founder of the modern German *Volkskunde*. Utješenović accepts without reserve and liberally quotes from Riehl's fundamental postulates of political economy, and this can be powerfully felt in his work (I have written on this, see 1984b). And what's more, he is Riehl's follower in other questions as well which are important for ethnology, for example the concept of *Sitte und Brauch*, i.e. custom (see Rihtman-Auguštin, 1987).

⁴ "*Maechte des sozialen Beharrens*" (see Rihtman-Auguštin 1984b: 76).

⁵ see L. Krader 1972: 72.

in ethnology was that folk culture is constantly observed *separately* from the culture of the higher strata.

On the basis of questions in the above mentioned *Osnova* that form Radić's *credo*, it is also possible *ex post* to construct a descriptive model of the zadruga:

Radić's model:

- joint family ownership of the land and work means, the dominant value of harmony; joint obligations toward the greater social system,
- joint life: members of the zadruga live in a common house, but individual couples may live separately; all members of the zadruga eat together,
- common work of the zadruga members within which the jobs are divided into male, female and what are called joint, i.e. those that both sexes do together.
- the head is the supreme authority: the house-mistress has power that comes from organization and supervision of *women's* work.

All the descriptions of zadruga life analyzed so far and the descriptive models deduced from them actually are showing only an ideal image of zadruga culture. The zadruga seems to exist without contradiction and without conflict. As if there are no cracks and dissonances in idyllic zadruga life.

As said before, it is clear that the existence of a zadruga family was a socioeconomic necessity for the feudal and post-feudal peasantry in this part of the world. Under the conditions of poverty, with farming techniques as they were, hardly permitting simple reproduction - the extended family that bonded its work force with biological ties (and insured a regular recruiting of soldiers in the Military Frontier Zone, by insuring the economic and social existence of the soldier's immediate family), was the only possible basis for economic organization. Such family organization could prevail only if it equalized interests, therefore if it valued above all harmony and the single authority of one person who deserved trust and held power. The dispersion of interests according to the criterion of individual property was a threat to the existence of such organization. The critique of individual interests and individualist behavior that one constantly comes across in the literature (non-fiction and fiction) about the zadruga is therefore understandable.

These, then, are the essential functions of such a zadruga community model. Since most writers concur on the description of the model and confirm its existence, everything seems fine, with no need to probe under the surface of the model and the zadruga itself.

Such probing, however, was motivated not only by the above-mentioned critiques, but also by other dissonances in the literature. For instance Antun Matija Reljković, the Enlightener, pointed out with a rationalist critique that communal families were not optimally productive: individuals, and particularly the head, often were lazy, individual members worked for themselves, improving their individual property and neglecting community work, they stole joint property and surplus. Even *just* patriarchal power, embodied in the head as Reljković shows, is not realized in everyday life because the head either usurps his power or is unable to fulfill what are occasionally contradictory functions. Reljković also says that the efficiency of work in the zadruga is low, and that squabbling among the members is latent. By this time it was already clear that an alternative female authority was active in the zadruga along with the male authority. And he, along with all earlier and later writers, criticizes this female power and female quarrels in the zadruga. He says that they undermine the zadruga. But despite these *female* quarrels the zadruga prevailed for another hundred and fifty years!

In the mid-19th century, the *zadruga* patriarchal communities in Croatia received critiques as well as praise from most of the participants in a survey run by the *Društvo gospodarsko hervatsko-slavonsko* (Society of Economics of Croatia-Slavonia). Most of the members of this society considered the *zadruga* an out-dated institution. They blamed it for the backward state of agriculture in the Croatian village and considered it was entirely inappropriate as a form of organization for rural communities after serfdom was abolished. They perceived it as the obstacle to industrial and capitalist development among other things, because it kept too much of the work force in the village. They mentioned the stark poverty (an example of a *zadruga* with 16 members that only owned a single pair of boots).

A rather interesting image of the life of the *zadruga* can be gleaned from monographs on folk life and customs written at the turn of the century modelled after Radić's *Osnova* as mentioned earlier. Those who wrote them also lived in the village, some were of peasant descent or peasants themselves, while others (such as priests) were closely tied to the village. *Osnova* was the research instrument that gave them insight into all aspects of life in the village and family. But some of them were quite perceptive and wrote also about relations and phenomena that were not outlined in the *Osnova*.

Judging by writers of the monographs in *zadrugas*, individual property was always present along with collective property; frequently this individual property was complementary to the collective holdings, and when the *zadruga* had no available money in cash, women would lend their private money which the *zadruga* was later (after selling its farming surplus) obliged to pay back. And at the turn of the century, as well as in Reljković's time, *theft* was always present in the *zadruga*. Women were usually accused of it, but the authors of the monographs disclosed that men also stole. All the writers described the division of labor into men and women's work; men's work, of course, enjoyed higher status. We can discern, however, that a certain (quite large,) quantum of what are termed *joint jobs* existed where women did men's jobs as well! Every single writer stressed the central value: harmony in the *zadruga*. But nonetheless, they touched, some explicitly and some implicitly, on the rather frequent, if not constant clashes between family groups and individuals. The authors mention conflicts and quarrels within the context of division and collapse of a *zadruga*. But we note that after the quarrels and division, the split families go on living as *zadrugas*. As if the *zadruga* did not have any other mechanism for resolving its conflicts except subdivision. The authority of the head is shown quite realistically, so it is possible to see that he was in fact limited on the one hand by the relations of power within the *zadruga*, and on the other by pressures from the greater social system.

And finally, it is most evident that the *zadruga* is linked by many communication ties to the greater social system: it sells its product on the market, it is obliged to pay taxes, it is responsible for the legal transgressions of its members, it tries in many ways to imitate the higher social classes, it attempts to attain friends or connections with certain very important persons...

All this, therefore, indicates that the everyday life of the *zadruga* did not go on according to the model. In essence the model existed only on the level of the imagined, or ideal order of things, while it was in fact constantly undermined.

My analysis shows, therefore, that in a period stretching back almost two hundred years into the past it is possible to document:

- a. Parallel (frequently complementary) existence of collective and individual property in the *zadruga*; the threat of individual interests (theft!) to collective property.

- b. The tendency of authoritative decision-making in parallel with limitations of such decision-making by the family collective. Cases are not rare when the power of the zadruga relies on power outside the zadruga, on feudal lords and the elite strata of the greater social system. And moreover this power depends on the existing legal system as well as the law of custom.
- c. Despite all the good intent and frequent emphasis on harmony in the zadruga, i.e. despite the stress on the pathological effect of conflict, there is indication of protracted presence of conflict in the communal families.
- d. As a side effect of analyzing the values and decision-making system in zadruga communities, the thinking structure surfaces which denies women publicly all rights while implicitly acknowledging them considerable authority.
- e. And finally, despite the closedness of the zadruga communal families, the greater social system evidently is in constant communication with such communities. Critical changes in the zadrugas i.e. subdivisions did not happen because of marginal inner conflicts, rather because of the pressures of capitalism in the greater social system.

Analysis also indicates that the values of the ideal model were, in reality, constantly threatened: conflict went arm in arm with harmony, authoritative decision-making with democratic form, the male power line was constantly threatened by the female subculture (which was latent), collective property and interest were constantly in competition with individual interest and property. And all this happened in communities that were trying but not succeeding to live isolated from the essential social and political processes.

There is a latent desire in all those who studied the zadruga at earlier times to describe this institution not only as economically autarchic but as something independent of the greater system. The reality was somewhat different: zadrugas are dependent on that system, not only because they can not be economically autarchic and must exchange goods, but also because they are dependent on the existent power system and considerable legal regulation that decrees their status and even their relation within it.

The *explanatory model* of the zadruga, therefore, should be supplemented by an article which would contain information about zadruga relations with the greater society. And not only that. It has already been shown that most of the writings about the zadruga speak only of one level of its existence, i.e. "how it ought to be". It has been established, however, that the reality of zadruga relations, as is the case with every reality, deviates significantly from its ideal picture.

Contemporary ethnological interpretation of the zadruga as an institution must, therefore, foresee encompassing both levels and finding a way of considering the imagined and real order, the ideal and real culture of the zadruga simultaneously.

Communities
of

	PROPERTY	WORK	LIFE	AUTHORITY	RELATIONS
Ideal Cul- ture	indivisible, family joint property, personal property as a disfunction	division of labor into male, female and joint jobs; the higher status of men's jobs, all work for zadruga benefit	extended family lives in harmony, the focal value is harmony; men have a higher status while women are subordinated	head is limited by male consensus, but strict and just	independence of the village family from the mainstream of society
Real Cul- ture	individual property with common property and com- plementary to it; theft of joint property	equal work load for both sexes; economic function of female personal work; the contra- dictions of special- ized work and the community	conflicts between families and indivi- duals; the female subculture	defiance of strict master; female influence opposing master's unjust decisions	many and varied contacts and communication between zadruga and feudal lords, gentry, market, communication systems

I do not wish to contend, on the basis of the literature about zadrugas from which this explanatory model of the zadruga emerged, that all zadrugas lived as is stated under the column *real culture*, nor do I think that they lived as imagined under *ideal culture*. In life *something else* is always happening. Individual zadrugas certainly had days when they enjoyed harmony, happiness and relative prosperity, but they also went through periods of conflict, poverty and other great difficulties. Real life most likely went on somewhere between the two described levels.

The objective of this model is to remind the researcher of this.

As Emile Sicard (1976, 262) remarked:

"I believe, one problem of a methodological nature is at the root of most errors of interpretation concerning the existence or the nonexistence, the survival or the death of the domestico-economic group. Something remains hidden, unconsciously hidden, in the personalities of men and women who live together in a group. Thus, when I questioned them, they seemed to think I was seeking too complicated a thought process for a phenomenon they tended to generalize. To summarize one of Durkheim's ideas, one knows very well that to live through something is not necessarily to know it."

It is a natural expectation perhaps that in everyday life *something remains hidden* to the same members of a family (mine, yours also!). It is something that happens between everyday individual expectations how family relations should be and how they really are in the living community. On the other hand if *something remains hidden* not only to people who live in a zadruga but to outsiders as well, then research needs a tool or model which will encompass or reach the hidden, the unrevealed.

In closing it is important to mention why the ideal picture of the zadruga prevailed for so long as the sole model, concealing the true state of affairs. It happened so because the model was a constituent part of the existence of the zadrugas themselves. Internal relations within zadrugas would not have been possible to sustain if it hadn't been for the value orientation that contained the ideas of a joint and indivisible ownership of land, of familial division of labor, of male domination, of the master's power and above all, of harmony. On

the other hand, in the greater social system this model played a powerful political role, so it was consistently supported in its romantic form. I have written on this elsewhere (Rihtman-Auguštin 1988). It may have this function, though to a lesser degree, even today.

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